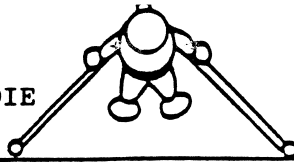


INSIDE THIS WEEK.....

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MATWATCH

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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By STEVE BEVERLY
MATWATCH Editor

A NEW VOICE

After surviving a four-day jaunt to New Orleans, a heartbreaker at the Sugar Bowl and a nasty stomach virus, I returned to a call from a new voice.

No, we're not idol-worshipping Jim Ross (see YOU SAID IT!), castigating David Crockett, or previewing the Royal Rumble (see PINFALL PROFILE) in STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS. The voice was that of Tony Richards.

Tony is what one might call the Joe Pedicino of Paducah, Ky. Saturday nights on WCEE in this hyphenated market, Tony hosts the wraparounds of a six-hour block of pro wrestling which is nearly a year old.

"It's really taken off for us," Richards told me.

"We've done real well in the two ratings surveys so far and we've attracted a lot of attention from viewers." Richards' Channel 54 is the "other" independent in his market---not the one affiliated with FOX and the youngest kid on the block which has to scrap for viewers like alley fighters on Bourbon Street.

"I try to keep the viewers up to date on all the feuds and try to do the best I can to segue one show into another," says Richards. "We also run a lot of viewer contests and offer prizes from local merchants and people know who we are now."

Richards' block of Continental, World Class, Wild West (soon to be U.S. Championship), Pro Wrestling This Week, Southern, Florida and Memphis may be along the third tier of promotions but he has to watch his budget. He's tried getting the WWF and NWA shows, which are on other stations in his market, but Tony says the syndicators simply want more money than his station can afford. So he makes the best of what he has and is drawing respectable 2 and 3 ratings.

About five months ago, I suggested in this column that the problem many independent stations face in programming pro wrestling is sales-oriented general managers who have no concept of how to market the genre.

If you're going to run a successful block of shows, it takes more than simply lumping them together for three or four hours on Saturday. I don't know why more stations haven't outright copied Joe Pedicino's original Atlanta format with his SUPERSTARS and found a local host (surely there's a strong enough wrestling fan/personality in every market...heck, it may even be you) to guide the viewers through a cycle of shows from a fan's-eye view.

The parallel is from the stations which have employed local emcees to host horror movie packages. I remember in 1977 when I was a newscaster in Columbus, Ga., at WTVM. We bought a package of dreadful horror flicks which were doing ratings as

horrible as the films. Our g.m., Lynn Avery, had the good sense of finding the station screwball, Lee Davis (my news photographer), and giving him free reign to create comedy segments to lampoon the movies. Lee pulled no punches and told you how bad the movie was before you saw the

opening credits. (In fact, Lee knows enough about wrestling, he'd be great in a similar role in any local market today--if anybody's reading!). Result: The movies quadrupled from a 2 to an 8 rating and actually beat SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE in four consecutive rating sweeps. It's all in the packaging.

That's why I'm heartened to see a guy like Tony Richards succeed in Kentucky. Tony knows the business, the personalities, the feuds, the storylines. And he enjoys it from the standpoint of a fan and it's coming across to his viewers. I wonder why in such a mesh of creative media as TV and pro wrestling more creativity isn't exercised into its presentation at the local station level. If anyone wants some answers as to why the ratings are down all over the U.S. for wrestling, maybe this is a key answer. Continued success, Tony!

COMINGS & GOINGS

DUSTY TO TURN; HORSEMEN TO RESURRECT
WITH REED, RHODES & EVENTUALLY ORTON

At least three sources have told MATWATCH a turn is nearing for Dusty Rhodes, who will become one of the vacant Four Horsemen, and be joined in the gang unit by the incoming Hacksaw Butch Reed. The turn, if effected, will precede by a period of months a babyface turn by Ric Flair. Tentative plans would have Bob Orton Jr., who has been signed for a mid-February NWA start, eventually become a fourth Horseman.

One key insider tells MATWATCH the Dusty turn, on the surface, will be healthy but a key wrestling media watcher has offered, "If they simply enter into a Flair-Rhodes series with the two guys simply in opposite places it will not accomplish a thing. Dusty as a heel is fine as long as the focus isn't built solely around him again."

STEAMBOAT FINALLY SIGNS FOR FEB. 20
NWA PPV; WILL MEET FLAIR

After months of negotiating, Ricky Steamboat has signed an NWA contract. The deal was finalized last Wednesday in Atlanta. Steamboat will meet Ric Flair

for the NWA world championship on the Feb. 20 Turner pay-per-view show from Chicago.

NWA President Jack Petrik told MATWATCH, "We are proud to have Ricky with us and are looking toward a long association with him. He really gives our talent roster a boost we've been looking for."

Steamboat will be re-introduced to the NWA viewers, tentatively, via an angle which involves Flair, Barry Windham & Eddie Gilbert. His last major match with Flair was at the 1984 Night of Champions at the New Jersey Meadowlands.

GILBERT GETS SHOT: Eddie Gilbert will get a return shot at Barry Windham on the PPV card, this time for the U.S. belt. Gilbert will have a TV rematch with Windham on TBS prior to the show.

CLOCK STRIKES 12: We hope to have the entire Feb. 20 card before the issue ends but one match tentative is a Midnight Express vs. Original Midnights in which the losing man has to split from his partner. Insiders say this may be an effort to exit Randy Rose. One clue: Brian Pillman, who enters the NWA Jan. 30, is now being mentioned as Dennis Condrey's new partner and it's no secret Paul E. Dangerously has coveted managing Pillman.

SURVIVOR SKINS: Other key sources tell us the buy-rate for the WWF SURVIVOR SERIES was 2.8%, which would be the lowest of any WWF PPV yet. The gross would be about \$4.2 million, if that holds.

STARRCADE \$\$\$: Turner Home Entertainment chief Steve Chamberlain says with some markets still not reporting, his buy-rate for STARRCADE '88 was "around 2.5%," which with a \$19.95 price would gross around \$4.8 million, the best NWA figure yet.

SUPERCLASH DECIMALS: The estimates on the SCIII buy-in are falling around 0.5% nationally, or 28,000 homes (\$420,000). Early word is that if Jerry Jarrett is ever involved in another PPV, it won't be with Verne Gagne.

OTHER NWA ARRIVALS: As THE WRESTLING OBSERVER has reported, Jimmy Garvin is headed back to the NWA to join Michael Hayes. Genichiro Tenryu is also coming in for three months as the Road Warriors' 6-man tag partner. Plus, expect a Rick Steiner-Abdullah the Butcher feud in the near future.

OBSERVATION: With the new acquisitions, I've counted as many as 42 men who are current or past "names" in pro wrestling about to be on the NWA roster if everyone stays (obviously, some have to go). In a sense, that's great but it also seems to me some people will be lost in the shuffle as far as focus for their feuds. Some repackaging of the format is in order and I know of one excellent idea to do it.

TOM & BRAD: I've heard basically good reaction to the Brad Armstrong-Tom Prichard CMF match but a lot of people still believe more heat could have been drawn with a Brad turn since Prichard's been on both sides of the fence 3 times.

GARVIN GROANS: Ronnie Garvin already doing jobs for Greg Valentine in the WWF. Quite a comedown for an ex-NWA champ.

WHO'S WATCHING: The WWF reportedly commissioned a study which indicates that 66% of the current pro wrestling fans are people who did not watch wrestling four years ago. If that's true, it ought to squash any talk that wrestling bulletins hurt the sport.

NETWORKING: In New Orleans while at the Sugar Bowl, we saw only four weekly wrestling hours listed: two WWF, NWA PRO and WORLD CLASS, which was on the only network affiliate. The breakdown is similar in Baton Rouge, although an extra hour of CMF still airs there.

WTWS in New London CT has picked up an extra hour of WWF.

PMTW ON FNN: Joe Pedicino has a new home on FNN/SCORE as of late February. PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK will premiere, likely on Saturday nights. FNN is also talking with Joe about hosting its planned weekly half-hour call-in show from Atlanta but no details finalized.

GORDY TO CMF: As expected, Terry Gordy has agreed to between-Japan dates this winter with the CMF. The NWA was also interested. Lines are open with Jerry Jarrett again as Jerry Lawler will defend the AWA belt on some CMF shows and the Stud Stable will visit as well. Keiji Muto (Super Black Ninja) is also headed in. Austin Idol returned during the holidays and paired with Charlie Platt at the TV mike.

MCCW EXITS: In addition to Muto, Kendo Nagasaki is out, headed for Nelson Royal's ATLANTIC COAST group. Talk is surfacing that the Samoan Swat Team may move to the ever-expanding NWA but not confirmed.

HEEL KENDALL: Not surprisingly, an upcoming NWA syndicated show has an incident involving Eddie Gilbert, Ric Flair & Dustin Rhodes that leads to Kendall Windham turning heel.

BIG BUYS: 7UP has made another \$700,000 advertising buy into the ALL-PRO network shows (CWA, AWA, PMTW, etc.). MARS Candy is renewing a \$1 million order, too. On the NWA, Old Spice now has an NWA gym bag offer and last weekend, Turner had sold 5 of the 6 national minutes in the syndie shows.

TERRY'S TRIALS: Terry Taylor's turn back to a face isn't leading to big things, as predicted here. His upcoming feud: with the "Brooklyn Battler," Steve Lombardi, who's getting his first minor push.

TV TEMPO (Week of Jan. 2-8)

(CWA/SYND.) - ARENA MATCH: Dutch Mantel d. Jerry Lawler in non-title match; STUDIO: Beauty & the Beast d. Johnson/Frazier; Jeff Jarrett/Tracy Smothers d. Medics before B&B run in; Sid Vicious d. William Thompson; Lawler wins 2 straight falls from Don Bass; ANGLE: Candi Devine & Sylvia Fuller get into a brawl. DRAW-PLUS.

(AWA/SYND.) - Recap of 3 matches from SUPERCLASH III. AWA has re-signed another year with ESPN (if you can find it). Next scheduled weekly show is Jan. 13 at midnight Eastern.

(WWC) - Repeat show. NOTE TO READERS: The best trade for the WWC English show is with anyone who gets Joe Pedicino's WVEU Saturday night show but WWC is about to be dropped from the sked.

(LTR) - Jeff & Ellen compete in a Science Fair and contend with a neighbor's irritating mother. No wrestlers appear and Lyle Alzado only shows up at the end. BOMB...NOTE: the show has been renewed for 1989-90 but no word if NWA wrestlers will continue to appear.

(SCW) - TOMMY RICH'S GREATEST HITS: Recap of Tommy's Southern title win over the Bullet, his attack on Mr. Big, his AWA title DQ loss to Jerry Lawler, and his turn on Scott Armstrong; plus, Chic Donovan sprays red paint on John Michaels and Dino Minelli/Steve Lawler's tar and feathering of Joey Maggs. Some of the matches okay but the wraparounds with Tommy, Mr. Donnie, Samuel Kent & Scrap Iron were horrible. BOMB-PLUS.

(WCCW) - Gary Young d. Tony Falk; Robert Fuller/Jimmy Golden win squash; Jeff Jarrett/Brickhouse Brown win DQ over Cactus Jack Manson/Iceman Parsons when Akbar's Army interfere; Samoan Swat Team d. The Beast/Kamala in surprisingly good match. REPLAY: Eric Embry's recent troubles against Akbar's Army. POWERSLAM...interesting show, even Akbar was funny in spots.

(CMF) - REPLAY: Tom Prichard-Brad Armstrong CMF title match where Tom uses hammer on Brad; Johnny & Davey Rich d. Detroit Demolition/Blade Warrior (Bill Tabb); Super Dave Baxter d. J.D. Wolfe but Baxter turns on manager Alan Martin before being jumped by Demo & Warrior; Black Bart d. Rick Keller; Storm Trooper d. Ronnie Thomas and hangs him before Bullet saves; CMF TITLE MATCH: Prichard wins DQ over Lee Peek when Brad runs in and 13-man melee erupts; Other winners: Doug Furnas, Kokina. RESTHOLD-PLUS...just not much zip.

(NWA/SYND.) - [WORLD WIDE]: Starrcade & Bunkhouse highlights (same on NWA PRO); REPLAY: Fantastics d. Only Midnight Express when Jim Cornette hits Randy Rose with racket; O.M.E. d. Texas Broncos when Paul E. hits Kendall Windham with phone; Other winners: JYD, Commandos. Paul E. challenges Fantastics to a "rubber" match next week. RESTHOLD.

[NWA PRO]: Broncos d. Max Miles/Mike Jackson; JYD d. Randy Hogan; Commandos d. Mike Justice/Tony Suber; Commandos d. Keith Steinborn/Bill Holliday. BOMB-PLUS.

(NWA/TBS) - [WCW]: NWA'S GREATEST HITS---Crockett Cup Finals; Flair-Sting from Clash I; Flair-Luger clips from STARRCADE; Bunkhouse '88 final; Midnights d. O.M.E. at STARRCADE. DRAW-PLUS...the show had excellent footage but moved slowly for a yearend recap. [A.M.]: MATCH OF WEEK---Barry Windham vs. Dick Murdoch still going as show ends; Luger/Sting d. Gary Royal/Rick Allen; Steve Casey (debut) d. Agent Steel; Larry Z/Al Perez d. Trent Knight/George South; Other winners: Russian A's, Eddie Gilbert. RESTHOLD. [MAIN EVENT]: Fantastics d. O.M.E. when Cornette hits Rose with racket; Texas Broncos d. Max Miles/Mike Jackson; Bobby Eaton d. Randy Rose. DRAW-PLUS...last match Jim & Paul E. put on a great show.

(PMTW) - Next-to-last yearender reviewing week of Von Erichs Parade of Champions card. No rating offered.

(WWF) - [SUPERSTARS]: Hart Foundation double DQ v. Honky Tonk Man/Greg Valentine; Tully & Arn d. Tim Horner/George South; Bubba Bossman d. Bill Mulkey; Ted DiBiase d. Scott Casey; Other winners: Jake Roberts, Demolition. BRO. LOVE v. Brutus Beefcake. DRAW-PLUS. [SPOTLIGHT]: Anabolic Warrior d. John Latu; Hercules Hernandez d. Boris Zhukov; Powers of Pain d. Joe Cruze/Lanny Poffo; Other winners: Akeem, Rockers. BRO. LOVE v. John Studd & Bobby Heenan. BOMB. [CHALLENGE]: Hercules d. Barry Horowitz; Ronnie Garvin d. Steve Lombardi; Rick Rude d. Robin Idle; Other winners: Powers of Pain, Jim Duggan, Haku. BOMB-PLUS.

(WWF/SNME) - Brutus Beefcake d. Ron Bass and cuts Bass's hair; Hulk Hogan wins DQ over Akeem when Bubba uses nightstick. ANGLE: Randy Savage refuses to aid when Liz first comes running and when Bubba & Akeem splash Hulk, Randy still doesn't come until Bubba tries to handcuff Liz; I-C TITLE: Anabolic Warrior d. Honky Tonk Man; Tito Santana d. Terry Taylor and Red Rooster turns on Bobby Heenan when the Brain tries to embarrass him for losing; Curt Hennig d. Koko B. Ware. INTERVIEW: Hogan & Savage deny trouble exists in the Megapowers. POWERSLAM-PLUS...the angles were well mixed and falls were scored in 4 of 5 matches.

RATING SCALE: PINFALL - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent. POWERSLAM - Good. DRAW - Average. RESTHOLD - Fair. BOMB - Poor. PLUS - Midscale rating.

LINES OF THE WEEK - 1. Jesse Ventura, SNME, on Megapowers' post-match comments: "It's worse than Contragate. It's worse than Watergate! They sounded like Haldeman and Erlichman on the stand." 2. Paul E. Dangerously, NWA PRO: "He (Mike Justice) is gonna get stopped worse than Jimmy the Greek at a Jesse Jackson fundraiser." 3. Ric Flair, TBS: "I'm Ted Turner's favorite son!" 4. Jim Cornette, TBS: "CCCC...I don't think that means Civilian Conservation Corps Patrol." 5. Marc Lowrance, WCCW: "If he (Iceman) was any more chicken, he'd be cackling." 6. Cornette, TBS: "Gary Royal was the winner of last year's Mickey Rooney

lookalike contest. " 7. Ventura, on haircut angle: "It reminds me of the opening scene in Stanley Kubrick's FULL METAL JACKET. "

8. Skandor Akbar, MCCW: "He (Gary Young) is young, good-looking and totally honest...just like me. " 9. Jim Ross, NWA PRO: "Kendall's hair looks like it's been combed with a weedeater. " 10. Cornette, TBS: "I'm afraid to hit Abdullah with my tennis racket. He might eat it. " 11. Larry Zbyszko, TBS: "I haven't been so excited since I retired Sammartino before 44,000. " 12. Ventura, WWF: "Looks like Rusty Brooks has been on your diet, McMahon. " 13. Cornette, "Gary Royal has just clotheslined Sting in the abdomen. It's as far as he can reach. " 14. Tommy Rich, SCW: "Shakin' hands and Kissin' babies just wasn't my thang. "

15. Heenan, WWF: "That's a nice haircut Garvin has...if you're going to The Chair. " 16. Cornette, TBS: "I'd like to thank whoever went to the cemetery and dug up Gary Hart. " 17. Ventura, SNME: "I think he (Anabolic) will look like Mean Gene's illegitimate son when this is over. " 18. Paul E., WWW: "This (Teddy Long) could very well be Jim Cornette's illegitimate half-brother. " 19. Ross, NWA PRO: "Our New Year's resolution is for Paul E. to get laryngitis. " 20. David Crockett, TBS: "Lex Luger is now a total wrestler, not just a Total Package. " 21. Charlie Platt, CWF, on fan picks for the "Mink Coat Tournament": "Forget about his looks...think about his capabilities. "

STRONGEST COMMENTS - 1. Flair, TBS: "Luger, you were the toughest competition I've ever faced. " 2. Robert Fuller, MCCW: "You people are overrun with ugly in Texas. "

BEST PICTURES - 1. NBC, Terry Taylor pounding on Heenan. 2. NBC, Hogan's atomic drop of Slick into Bubba. 3. MCCW, Brickhouse Brown in Auburn U. jacket. 4. MCCW, Jeff Jarrett backdrop of Cactus Jack onto floor. 5. WWF, Beefcake pics of potential Ron Bass coiffures.

BEST AUDIO - 1. NBC, Taylor telling Heenan "here's a little going away present for you" before punching him out of ring. 2. NBC, Liz yelling for Randy to help Hogan.

BEST ANALYSIS - Ventura, saying Bass squandered 2 pin opportunities on Beefcake.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK - Slick, SNME: "How close...how tight are the Megapowers?"

BEST STATISTIC - Charlie Platt, CWF, "Kokina is 38-0 in the CWF. "

BLOOPER AWARDS - 1. Luger, TBS: "Tony, thank you for the allocades. " (What happened to ACCOLADES?) 2. MCCW, for Jeff JERRETT super. At least we're getting closer to JARRETT.

WORST PERSONALITY OF '89 NOMINEE - Mr. Donnie, SCW: Must be seen & heard NOT to be believed.

BOO AWARD - NWA, for abruptly cutting off both syndicated shows in mid-commentary of Bunkhouse highlights.

TUBE TALK

Even though Andre's "heart attack" was tough to top, this was the most entertaining SNME of the season. The Taylor turn was well done and the Hogan-Savage soap opera was grandiosely chaptered...One of the few flaws: a rare time a WWF show didn't light someone down the aisle as did not happen when Liz ran after Randy...I'll predict the Feb. 3 show won't do the 15.2 rating of last year. Why? Stronger comedy competition on ABC.

THE MATCH OF THE WEEK addition between "name" performers on the TBS a.m. show is a positive step but it will antagonize viewers if it's always at the end like Saturday with just a few minutes left....Next week's A.M. main event: JYD/Michael Hayes vs. Russian A's....Two biggies next Sat. night: a Barry-Eddie rematch, a chapter that leads to Steamboat's return---and a Rotunda-Steiner TV title rematch....I'm being told now that a Dusty turn was discussed Thursday, is being "considered" but is far from certain.

Nelson Royal's ACW resumes tapings with Joe Pedicino & Rick Stewart Friday night. I hope to have regular results now....Tommy Rich, who's playing a great heel now and has been approached by the NWA, should never, NEVER host an hour show again. Those SCW yearend wraparounds were excruciating!...Whether you like their pushed talent now, the World Class show did a nice job of detailing the Eric Embry-Akbar troubles, with lots of nice digital effects during the package....Charlie Platt called Thursday morning to say he saw Rebecca and me in the SUGAR BOWL crowd and wondered what we were mad at. We were down 13-0 and had just fumbled....The host lineup for NWA MAIN EVENT will apparently be Tony Schiavone & J. J. in the studio and Jim Ross calling play-by-play at the arenas. NEXT weekend's show will air on Saturday night at 8:05 instead of going opposite the SUPER BOWL. Wise move.

CABLE RATINGS RAP (Shows of Dec. 24-26)

			Rating	Share
WWF	PTW	(USA 12/26)	2.8	4.5
NWA	WCW	(TBS 12/24)	2.7	6.9
NWA	CW	(TBS 12/24)	1.8	5.2
NWA	ME	(TBS 12/25)	1.7	4.8

(ANALYSIS: Everything down because Dec. 24 & 25 are the two least-watched days of the year---July 4 the other. But TBS officials were encouraged by the 7 share of WCW, its highest in ages. The WWF show still outpulls the rerun and movie block on other USA nights. The New Year's weekend numbers weren't available because of a computer delay at A.C. Nielsen.)

The CWF TV show ONCE AGAIN got moved around this past (New Year's) weekend. It popped up (without warning) on SUNDAY at 2:30 p.m. I was lucky to find it at all.

I enjoyed the Prichard-Armstrong bout and Tom's turn was well done, though I thought it would have been more interesting to see Brad turn heel. This will be a good feud but the CWF is still in big trouble, for now anyway.

DAVID WILLIAMSON
CLEVELAND TN

Please give me a break. Is all this praise of Jim Ross really necessary? We all have our own opinions. I don't want to read about why you love Jim Ross every issue.

STEVE BRYANT
TULLAHOMA TN

I only have one problem (with MATWATCH): that is Jim Ross. Don't get me wrong. You have every right to worship him if you like. But don't run down Mark Lowrance of World Class. Ross isn't anywhere in Mark's class.

RANDALL FANNING
LYNCHBURG TN

(FSB: Admittedly, our praise of Jim has been effervescent and like in any medium, he has his detractors just as Mark has fans. Having said that, I will say that my view of Mr. Ross is not unlike that of many within the industry, be we right or wrong, such as in the following letter.)

I appreciate the time you've taken to let the nation know of the talents of Jim Ross. We, too, have felt Jim has been underappreciated by the Crockettts and only recently has TBS been using him to his full potential. We just hope he doesn't get bounced around by his new employers.

CARL AND JANE FREEMAN
BLACKWELL OK

I watched the WTBS AM show on 12/17 that you lambasted David Crockett and found Paul E. highly entertaining. I completely disagree with your "analysis" of this particular show. The most important point of a TV wrestling show is to describe the action taking place. Paul wouldn't allow David to speak by hogging the airwaves. David appeared to be a model of mature restraint dealing with Paul E.'s obnoxiousness. Tell me, do you instruct your students to cut off the announcer doing the play-by-play? Do you advise your pupils to be cruel to their partner and instigate acrimony on the air? Jim Cornette comes across as playfully poking fun at David and the rest of the announcers with some style and wit. In my opinion, Paul E. was out and out mean and made a fool of himself. In your analysis of announcers, you are really putting David to the coals. It almost sounds as if you have a personal vendetta against David. We all realize there are announcers just as awful, and as a professor, and one who should know better, you have crossed the boundary of honest professionalism.

JOHN LANIGAN
MCKEESPORT PA

(FSB: First, let me say that John has been a loyal reader whose views, including these, I respect. I plead guilty to being tough on David, perhaps harder than on any announcer because this is a guy with 15-plus years of experience on view by more than three million viewers a week. I won't rehash the problems I've had with his lack of preparation, stepping on his co-hosts---as he did three weeks in a row on WORLD WIDE with Tony Schiavone---and his constant destruc-

tion of heel interviews. I simply feel he and TBS both owe a lot more to their viewers than this type of performance.

As for the Paul E. show, I'll readily agree that in the last 20 minutes, Paul came across looking like a boor. But from several sources who were at the taping, Jim Crockett himself had set up that storyline around Paul E.'s presentation of Christmas gifts to the wrestlers and he was directed to play the contrasting obnoxious heel to the loud-mouth new babyface of Cornette. My information is that David was unenthusiastic about working with Paul from the start and at one point even turned his back to Paul and delivered a quarter-hour of commentary in that fashion. Consequently, Paul's work came across far less effective than he was directed to do so by his boss. Sure, the play-by-play is the central focus but when the show producers shift that focus to a heel commentator's role, any announcer should be professional enough to try to make that work.

On a final note, John wrote me a subsequent letter saying he went overboard on this and a second item he asked me to delete, which I have. But out of respect for the fact he thought enough to write me a challenging letter, which I welcome, I'd like to address the other matter. In the Dec. 19 issue, I wrote a line about a young wrestler who turned out to be Vula that could easily have been interpreted as both racist and sexist when it was not intended. Even though we attributed that account to a report from one of my readers, the remark was not necessary. I do think Vula ought to be working for David McLane instead of the NWA but I certainly apologize to anyone who was offended. This from a guy who in 1973, struck nerves with an all-male Touchdown Club in Waycross, Ga., for a sports editorial castigating this group for not awarding the school's Best All-Around Athlete trophies to two black females who had led the local school to state championships in both girls basketball and tennis, instead of the football quarterback who had a lackluster season.)

I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed receiving MATWATCH. It's simply written, gets straight to the point and, most of all, it helps me decipher which items I need to trade for off of the weekly TV shows.

I was at SURVIVORS. By the way, Jesse is full of (bleep)---Cleveland's a fabulous place to spend Thanksgiving!!!

BOB SHATTUCK
CLEVELAND OH

YOU SAID IT!!! appears monthly in MATWATCH. Letters to: STEVE BEVERLY, 213 PINE HILLS AVE., AUBURN AL 36830.

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LISTEN TO THE JINGLE, THE RUMBLE
AND THE ROAR

I realize I'm getting older when a year passes as fast as the one since the Battle of Jan. 24, 1988. That's the Sunday night Vince McMahon successfully snuffed Jim Crockett's pay-per-view entry, THE BUNKHOUSE STINKWELL from Nassau Coliseum.

Now that a semblance of order has been restored from confrontational supercards, we turn our attention Sunday to ROYAL RUMBLE II, live from the Houston Summit (4 p.m., EST). The show which continues the saga, "How much wider will Hulk & Randy split?"

At least this year, we're spared the embarrassment of an angle such as the Dino Bravo "weightlifting record." Of course, this time, we're treated to the spinetingling spectacle of an Anabolic Warrior-Rick Rude posedown, otherwise known as the STERIOD STUMBLE. We'll have the obvious angle to start a major feud with these two over the Intercontinental belt. Maybe Rick can learn how to shake the ropes.

One thing to watch for during the actual RUMBLE itself is whether Titan cuts the clock shorter than two minutes between entrances. With 30 guys in this thing, there's no way most of them can last the 56 minutes it ordinarily would be guaranteed to last. Favorites? Not Hogan or Savage because they have to screw each other up to widen the split. Bad News Brown? Nah, they're not going to get into a perpetual thing like Dusty's NWA BUNKHOUSE tradition, which also means Jim Duggan won't repeat.

My instincts tell me John Studd because it's the quickest way to get him over as a successful babyface, even though I don't believe the average fan will remember the outcome in a month. Ronnie Garvin is not getting that big of a push and Curt Hennig has cooled so much, I can't see him taking it.

The best pure wrestling will occur in the Hart Foundation/Duggan vs. Rougeau Brothers/Bravo 2-out-of-3 match if Duggan & Bravo are kept to a minimum. The Beefcake-Bass haircut match is for comedy and I know few who care about Rockin Robin vs. Judy Martin.

I stated a few months ago that Vince should have allowed this to stay a USA live special, rather than going PPV with it. He does have a good slot on the week before the SUPER BOWL but I'm convinced that with the saturation of the pay market and with the less than blockbuster buys for SURVIVOR SERIES, no show outside of WRESTLEMANIA will be a rocket-launcher. There's just not enough in THE ROYAL RUMBLE to put the super in supercard. The event was interesting enough last year to draw the highest rating ever for a cable wrestling show and the highest-scoring program in the history of the USA Network. But with five pay shows in a 12-week period, not even the master of hype can draw megamillions from a show I believe to be more on the level of a good SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT.

A few more of the small-town cable systems are picking this up than carried SURVIVOR SERIES. In my hometown of Waycross, Ga., this is their first pay show and since Dec. 20, a half-hour preview loop tape provided by the WWF has been running non-stop on Channel 43 to plug the show and I assume a similar tactic is being employed elsewhere.

I do expect a nice afternoon of entertainment before the ultimate split on February 3 on NBC.

STARRCADE '88: POST-MORTEM

A few parting notes on TRUE GRIT: we've had 53 calls and cards on the show and the response was remarkably favorable: 25 rated the show "great," 14 good to "very good," 7 termed it "better-than-average," 3 "fair," 2 "below par" and 2 "poor."

One of the industry's key analysts did tell us: "It showed me that some thinking went into an NWA show, for once, other than Dusty Rhodes'."

*** PINFALL PROFILE ***

I, for one, believe Lex Luger wrestled the match of his career, much to my pleasant surprise. As one observer told me, "I think Lex came out of this match stronger than he's ever been, even in defeat. Although, if a Dusty turn is employed soon, it would not surprise me to see him mired in a Luger-Rhodes feud. In hindsight, I would probably elevate the rating of the Flair-Luger match to a PILEDRIVER, considering the remarkable effort exerted.

Finally, on the technical aspect, of which the early and midshow audio and feed problems were way below TBS standards, MATWATCH has been assured we won't see those errors again. "We had our 'C' team people working that night because so many of our toplineers had been given the holiday off," said a top-line TBS executive. "But the riot act was read over all the foulups and I can assure you, it's not gonna happen again."

All in all, though, I think tickets and buy-ins were sold for Feb. 20, a night I increasingly believe holds the promise for a world title to change in Chicago. Don't ask me why but I just believe Steamboat isn't coming in for nostalgia.

CHI-TOWN RUMBLE: THE FULL CARD

There is one change to what we reported earlier: a U.S. Title match billed as "The Match That Never Was" is listed for the Feb. 20 PPV between Barry Windham and Dusty Rhodes, instead of Eddie Gilbert, according to TBS. Of course, the card is "subject to change," as we're told.

The rest: ~TV TITLE: Rick Steiner vs. Mike Rotunda (rematch); Road Warriors vs. Kevin Sullivan & Steve Williams (WORLD TAG TEAM TITLE MATCH); the Midnights-Midnights match where the losing man leaves the NWA; Sting vs. Butch Reed; and The Bunkhouse Stampede finals (I guess if the match is Barry vs. Dusty, we won't have a four-time Bunkhouse champion).

On CLASH V, the only match I firmly know is The Road Warriors vs. Steiner and I believe JYD & Michael Hayes, but I may have the opponents wrong.

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NEXT ISSUE